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Emergence of BJP in Odisha: A critical analysis of 2024 state assembly election

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Abstract

The 2024 Odisha State Assembly Election marked a significant turning point in the political landscape in Odisha. It highlights the unprecedented rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a formidable political force. Odisha was traditionally ruled by the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) under the leadership of Naveen Patnaik, with relative continuity in governance since 2000. But, the 2024 election outcomes reflect a landmark shift, where the BJP emerged as a key contender, substantially improving its seat share and voter base. This article critically analyzes the multifaceted factors contributing to the BJP's electoral emergence in Odisha and ranging from anti-incumbency sentiments, strategic candidate selection. The study adopts a mixed-method approach, utilizing both qualitative content analysis and quantitative electoral data to examine the political reconfiguration. The paper evaluates the declining vote share of the BJD, the Congress party's continued marginalization, and the growing appeal of BJP's development promises aligned with the Modi government's central schemes such as PMAY, Jal Jeevan Mission, and DBT initiatives etc. The findings show a transformative moment in Odisha politics where identity, ideology, and governance intersect, possibly heralding a new era of bipolar competition between BJP and BJD in the state's democratic discourse.

Keywords: BJP, BJD, Odisha 2024 Elections, State Politics, Political Shift

Introduction

The state of Odisha, situated in the eastern belt of India, has long witnessed the predominance of regional political forces, particularly the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), which has maintained uninterrupted power since 2000. This dominance created a perception of political stability and strong regional governance in Odisha under the leadership of Shri Naveen Patnaik. However, the 2024 Odisha State Assembly Election changes the perception. A significant shift in the political equilibrium, as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as a challenge to the established order and reshaping the contours of Odisha's political narrative. In the 2019 election, the BJD secured 112 out of 147 assembly seats with a vote share of 44.7%, while the BJP won only 23 seats despite an improved vote share of 32.5% (Election Commission of India, 2019). Fast forward to 2024, the BJP made notable gains, increasing both its seat count and popular support especially in western and northern Odisha (ECI, 2024). This change can be attributed to multiple factors such as the anti-incumbency sentiments that began surfacing against the BJD government. The BJP successfully leveraged central schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission, and Ayushman Bharat to penetrate rural constituencies and project a development-centric narrative (Patnaik, 2024) ^[25]. National leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah played pivotal roles in campaigning, emphasizing a "double engine" governance model that appealed to aspirations for growth and connectivity (Mishra & Das, 2024) ^[16]. The BJP's organizational restructuring in Odisha, including increased booth-level mobilization helped the party to counter the BJD's long-standing narrative of Odia identity politics. The emergence of the BJP in Odisha, therefore, is not merely an electoral event but a significant political phenomenon that reflects the broader nationalization of regional political spaces in India. The critical analysis that follows in this study will further examine these structural changes, ideological shifts, and campaign strategies that enabled the BJP's rise in Odisha's contemporary political discourse.

Historical background of BJP in Odisha

The Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP has historically played an important role in Odisha's political landscape, which has been largely dominated by regional parties and the Indian National Congress.

For decades, Odisha's electorate favored homegrown political formations that emphasized regional identity, such as the Biju Janata Dal or BJD founded by Naveen Patnaik in 1997 following the legacy of his father, Biju Patnaik. One of the most consequential phases in the BJP's early presence in Odisha was its alliance with the BJD from 1998 to 2009. This coalition helped the BJP gain ministerial representation at the state level and marginal electoral traction in Odisha. The alliance allowed the BJP to consolidate its support base in western Odisha and among upper-caste and tribal communities, while the BJD leveraged its broader appeal across the state. However, this partnership ended in 2009 following communal tensions in Kandhamal and increasing ideological divergence between the two parties (Jena, 2011)^[12]. Following the alliance breakdown, the BJP experienced a steep decline in electoral performance. In the 2009 Assembly elections, the party managed to secure only 6 out of 147 seats, a sharp contrast to its earlier performance under the coalition banner (Election Commission of India, 2009). This period marked a political vacuum for the BJP in Odisha, as the BJD continued to consolidate its dominance and the Congress remained the principal opposition. The tide began to turn in the 2014 general elections when the BJP increased its vote share nationally under the leadership of Shri Narendra Modi. The 2019 general elections were a watershed moment for the BJP in Odisha, with the party winning 8 out of 21 Lok Sabha seats, a significant gain compared to just 1 seat in 2014 (ECI, 2019). Thus, the historical trajectory of the BJP in Odisha from a junior coalition partner to an emergent independent contender highlights the party's long struggle for relevance in a region historically inclined toward regionalism. The 2024 Assembly election stands as a culmination of this long-term strategy, representing not just electoral progress but also a significant ideological and organizational expansion of the BJP within the complex political environment of Odisha.

2024 Assembly Election: A Game Changer

The 2024 Odisha Legislative Assembly election emerged as a political watershed moment, fundamentally altering the electoral trajectory of the state. More than two decades, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) had maintained a dominant grip on Odisha's political apparatus. The 2024 elections disrupted this long-standing monopoly, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) recording unprecedented gains, marking a shift in the state's political dynamics. According to data from the Election Commission of India (2024), the BJP secured 78 out of 147 assembly seats and formed the government independently in Odisha for the first time. The BJD, which had previously held 112 seats in the 2019 elections, was reduced to 51 seats, indicating a steep decline in popular support. The BJP's performance in 2024 represents more than just a numerical victory. It signifies a structural transformation in the political consciousness of the Odia electorate. Several factors contributed to this outcome. Here are some of the important factors discussed below. After 24 years of continuous rule, public discontent began surfacing against the BJD, especially over issues such as unemployment, alleged bureaucratic dominance, and declining quality of public services in rural areas (Mohapatra, 2024)^[18]. This network was instrumental in mobilizing support, especially among youth and first-time voters. The BJP successfully projected its development

agenda by emphasizing central schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), PM-KISAN, Ayushman Bharat, and Jal Jeevan Mission, which resonated particularly in semi-urban and tribal areas (Ministry of Rural Development, 2024). Prime Minister Narendra Modi played a pivotal role in galvanizing support in Odisha. His rallies attracted large crowds, and the narrative of "double-engine sarkar" (the same party at both center and state) found traction among aspirational voters seeking rapid development. The BJP's victory in Odisha is not only symbolically significant but also strategically vital. Odisha had long been considered resistant to the saffron party's ideology, with a political culture rooted in regional pride and secular values.

The Voter Fatigue: A Statistical Analysis

The 2024 Odisha Assembly Election outcomes revealed a pronounced anti-incumbency wave against the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), which had governed in Odisha since 2000. While the BJD had successfully maintained its dominance for over two decades through a combination of welfare schemes and regional identity politics. In the 2019 Odisha Assembly elections, the BJD secured 112 out of 147 seats, with a vote share of 44.7% (Election Commission of India, 2019). By 2024, the BJD's tally had dropped to 51 seats, with a reduced vote share of approximately 39.1%, reflecting a swing of -5.6 percentage points, 2024). This steep decline in both seat count and popular vote is indicative of substantial voter fatigue. A closer examination of age-wise voter participation shows that the 18-29 age group accounted for nearly 29% of the total voter base in the 2024 elections, according to a voter demographics analysis by the Centre for Electoral Studies (2024). Surveys conducted by the Odisha Voter Perception Poll in early 2024 revealed that over 63% of first-time voters expressed a preference for "leadership change" and 55% supported the BJP, citing reasons such as lack of employment opportunities, outdated leadership, and bureaucratic control in the BJD government (OVPP, 2024). The youth-specific indicators such as the urban unemployment rate of 11.2% in Odisha (2023) (National Statistical Office, 2023) amplified frustrations among younger voters. Despite the BJD's long-standing emphasis on welfare schemes like KALIA and Mission Shakti, the aspirational youth began demanding policy reforms focused on innovation, job creation, and entrepreneurship areas where the BJP positioned itself as a more promising alternative. This statistical evidence clearly suggests that anti-incumbency in 2024 was not merely a sentiment rooted in time but a data-driven outcome shaped by shifting demographics, unmet expectations, and the increasing political engagement of younger, educated, and urban voters.

- Strategic Leadership and Grassroots Mobilization:** The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) rise in the 2024 Odisha Assembly elections can be largely attributed to its robust strategy of grassroots mobilization and strategic leadership selection. One of the cornerstones of this transformation was the BJP's investment in booth-level architecture across Odisha. The party activated over 45,000 booth committees by early 2024, each consisting of dedicated "Panna Pramukhs" grassroots workers responsible for micro-level voter contact (BJP Odisha State Unit Report, 2024). These

workers were trained in voter engagement, digital outreach, and coordination of central welfare schemes at the local level, especially in tribal-dominated districts such as Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, and Kandhamal. Samal, a former minister and seasoned leader from coastal Odisha, bridged the rural-urban and central-state gap in campaign messaging. The cumulative effect of this focused strategy was a perceptible momentum on the ground.

- **The Central Welfare Schemes:** The 2024 Odisha Assembly election witnessed a profound influence of centrally sponsored welfare schemes and the national image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the voting behavior of the rural electorate. According to the Ministry of Rural Development (2024), by April 2024 More than 24 lakh houses were sanctioned under PMAY-Gramin in Odisha, with a completion rate exceeding 80%. Over 89% of rural households in Odisha received tap water connections under the Jal Jeevan Mission. The Ujjwala Yojana had benefited over 32 lakh women in the state since its inception, with an 18% increase in refills in 2023-24 compared to the previous year. These schemes not only improved rural living standards but also generated significant political capital for the BJP in Odisha. Field surveys conducted by the Odisha Election Study Group (2024) found that 67% of rural respondents credited the central government for improvements in housing and sanitation, while 59% linked welfare delivery to the leadership of Narendra Modi.
- **Regional And Caste Dynamics:** The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) unprecedented electoral success in the 2024 Odisha Assembly election can be significantly attributed to its strategic adaptation to the state's intricate regional and caste-based social fabric. Odisha, characterized by diverse ethno-regional identities and layered caste structures, had historically seen dominance by regional parties like the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), which leveraged sub-regional loyalties, dominant OBC support, and tribal outreach. In 2024, the BJP successfully disrupted this entrenched equation by recalibrating its caste alliances and regional presence. The key shift was the BJP's focus on non-dominant OBC groups, particularly in western and southern Odisha. The BJP's emphasis on OBC representation in candidate selection was evident, with over 34% of its candidates belonging to OBC categories (Election Watch & ADR, 2024). This allowed the party to appeal to aspirational backward castes that felt underrepresented by the BJD's top-down leadership model. On the Other hand in tribal regions, the BJP made significant inroads by intensifying its Scheduled Tribe (ST) outreach, particularly in districts like Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, and Rayagada, where it not only fielded tribal candidates but also projected existing tribal leaders such as Jual Oram and Bishweswar Tudu as symbols of indigenous leadership. The BJP's tribal support increased from 27.5% in 2019 to nearly 42% in 2024, marking a substantial shift in ST voter alignment (Tribal Political Mapping Report, 2024). In coastal Odisha traditionally a BJD bastion the BJP tapped into newly urbanized and educated middle-class communities, unemployment, and bureaucratic

inaccessibility.

Electoral Data and Voter Turnout

The 2024 Odisha Legislative Assembly election marked a significant shift in the state's political trajectory. A detailed examination of the electoral data and voter turnout reveals both quantitative and qualitative trends that underpin the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) emergence and the Biju Janata Dal's (BJD) electoral decline. According to the Election Commission of India (ECI, 2024), voter turnout in the 2024 Odisha Assembly election stood at 74.45%, a modest increase from the 73.2% recorded in 2019. This increase, although not dramatic, indicated heightened voter engagement, particularly in urban and tribal regions, where the BJP made considerable inroads. Among first-time voters aged 18-22, turnout was estimated at over 65%, a demographic that largely resonated with the BJP's youth-centric messaging and calls for governance reform (ADR & CSDS, 2024). In terms of party performance, the BJP emerged as the single largest party by securing 78 out of 147 seats, a sharp rise from the 23 seats it held in the 2019 Assembly. Its overall vote share increased to 40.2%, up from 32.5% in 2019, reflecting a gain of nearly 8 percentage points (ECI, 2024). The analysis of booth-level data shows that BJP-led constituencies saw a voter turnout average of 76.1%, slightly higher than the state average. The BJP's success was not merely based on increased vote share but on a strategic conversion of that share into winnable constituencies across regions and demographics, while the BJD failed to counter emerging voter fatigue and opposition consolidation.

Implications for Odisha Politics

The 2024 Assembly election results in Odisha signify more than an electoral victory for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), they represent a fundamental transformation in the political equilibrium of the state. The emergence of BJP as a powerful electoral force is poised to reshape not only the structure of political competition but also the dynamics of governance and democratic accountability in Odisha. The most immediate implication is the collapse of BJD's unchallenged dominance, which had defined Odisha politics for over two decades. Since 2000, the BJD has operated as a hegemonic regional force, facing little resistance either from the Congress or the BJP. The political space that was once monopolized by a single party will now witness ideological contests and policy differentiation hallmarks of a healthy democratic system. The BJP's ideological and governance model, which emphasizes infrastructure development, industrial investment, and digital transformation, may influence Odisha's future policy orientation. If the BJP shares power or wins the next election, one can expect a shift from welfare-centric populism to a more market-friendly and reform-oriented framework as seen in BJP-ruled states like Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2024) ^[3]. Areas like Mining reforms, urban infrastructure, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems are likely to receive increased attention. Another consequence is the potential re-evaluation of Odisha's bureaucracy-centric governance model, which came under scrutiny during the BJD's recent tenure particularly under V.K. Pandian's informal leadership. The BJP's emphasis on politically accountable leadership and grassroots participation may

push for decentralization of decision-making and empowerment of elected representatives over bureaucrats in public service delivery (India Governance Review, 2024)^[10]. This may also result in greater transparency, people's participation, and a reduced perception of technocratic elitism in state institutions. However, this may also provoke tensions over issues of federalism, resource control, and linguistic identity if not managed sensitively.

Challenges ahead for BJP

While the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) emergence as the dominant political force in Odisha in the 2024 Assembly elections marks a historic breakthrough, sustaining this momentum presents challenges. Transitioning from opposition to governance not only electoral strength but also administrative vision, local adaptability, and sustained grassroots engagement. One of the primary challenges for the BJP will be meeting the high expectations of the electorate. Voters who opted for change, especially youth and marginalized communities, anticipate immediate improvements in employment, education, infrastructure, and public services. Any misstep particularly on issues like land rights, tribal autonomy, and resource distribution could reignite regional resistance, especially in western and tribal-dominated districts (Sahu, 2024)^[27]. Despite its electoral success, the BJP in Odisha still faces a leadership vacuum at the state level. The party lacks a mass-based regional leader who can unify diverse factions and represent the party's face consistently across the state. The over-dependence on national figures might hamper the party's long-term sustainability unless it cultivates leaders with strong local connect (Sinha, 2024)^[29]. Many leaders from other parties, particularly Congress and even BJD, have joined BJP in recent years.

Conclusion

The 2024 Odisha Assembly elections represent a watershed moment in the state's political history. The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) unprecedented rise signals a break from Odisha's prolonged era of single-party dominance and marks the beginning of a more competitive and pluralistic democratic order. The emergence of the BJP has redefined the contours of political discourse in the state shifting it from welfare populism to a model that blends national narratives with localized aspirations. Yet, the transformation is far from complete. The BJP's future success in Odisha will depend on its ability to sustain mass connect, deliver governance outcomes, and navigate complex socio-political dynamics, including caste equations, regional identities, and economic disparities. As political competition intensifies, Odisha's democratic landscape is likely to become more vibrant, issue-oriented, and electorally volatile. In essence, the 2024 election has set the stage for a new phase of political realignment, where ideological clarity, leadership quality, and policy performance will determine the trajectory of power. It is not merely a shift in seats, but a signal of evolving voter consciousness that demands change, voice, and participation in shaping Odisha's future. Currently it's premature time to say anything about the future of BJP in Odisha State Politics.

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